

**Testimony Submitted to the
THE CALIFORNIA PERFORMANCE REVIEW (CPR) COMMISSION
CORRECTIONS REFORM - INDEPENDENT REVIEW PANEL (IRP) AND
PUBLIC SAFETY**

Carpenter Performing Arts Center (CPRC)
California State University, Long Beach
1250 Bellflower Boulevard
Long Beach, CA 90840
September 10th, 2004
Long Beach, California

Jason Ziedenisberg
Senior Policy Advisor
Fight Crime: Invest in Kids California
(510) 836.6503, ext 302, email: Jason@calfightcrime.org

The 300 police chiefs, sheriffs, district attorneys and crime survivor members of FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS *California* are dedicated to reducing crime and violence before it starts by investing in youth.

The law enforcement leaders of FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS *California* are committed to public safety strategies that include, as necessary, the incarceration of dangerous and violent youth. We also recognize that, whether incarcerated or not, youth in the juvenile justice system need to be provided with services that will prevent additional or repeat criminal activity. Recidivism among Youth Authority wards is a particularly profound problem in California, running as high as 90%.

In light of a series of reports regarding inadequacies at the CYA, and our ongoing organizational interest in providing quality crime reduction interventions and mental health services to youth in the juvenile justice system, FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS *California* asked its Law Enforcement Advisory Committee on Mental Health—members of our Executive Committee who advise us on issues concerning court involved youth—to consider some basic principles to guide the state's juvenile justice reform efforts.

1) Improve the CYA: Develop an Environment Conducive to Treatment, Rehabilitation and Reduced Recidivism

According to a recent Stanford University study, as many as 97% of the youth in the CYA have mental health problems, yet many wards receive substandard services, and are housed in units that are not conducive to rehabilitation.

The CYA should consist of a well-supervised environment that provides effective mental health and substance abuse services to youth in need. The state should consider models where youth are placed in smaller secure facilities near their homes, and have better access to mental health and substance abuse services.

To help guide the CYA towards achieving its mission of public safety and rehabilitation, there must be improvements in the oversight and independent monitoring of conditions, and the level and quality of services.

2) Strengthen Aftercare Services

Currently, CYA aftercare services are inadequate and, reportedly, half of all CYA wards have their parole revoked or been recommitted for a new offense within two years of release. When youth in the CYA, probation camps and detention centers eventually return to their home communities, they need quality aftercare services, including mental health treatment that builds upon and continues the treatment they received while incarcerated. The state could improve aftercare services by shifting this function to county probation departments as long as a stable and appropriate funding stream can be designated for this purpose.

3) Build Up County Capacity To Provide Intensive Services and Earlier Interventions

While the CYA provides secure lockup for dangerous and violent youth, CYA is also a disposition for more moderate and low-level delinquents who are sent there because counties lack sufficient local treatment options. Moderate and low-level delinquents can be held accountable and treated more efficiently and cheaply in county or regional facilities and community programs, but many jurisdictions need to improve their capacity to house and serve these youth.

To improve county capacity to treat more low-level delinquents close to home, the state should:

- **Maintain Current Investments in Programs to Serve Youth:** State support for county youth probation services and the Juvenile Justice Crime Prevention Act (JJCPA) dollars counties currently receive fund many quality intervention and treatment programs for youth and should be maintained;
- **Improve Collaboration—Maximize Community Involvement.** Improved collaboration among mental health and substance abuse providers, probation, community-groups, youth and affected families would greatly improve public safety by enhancing the delivery and range of intervention services youth receive;
- **Reinvest Resources in Communities.** It costs the state \$80,000 a year to incarcerate a ward in the CYA. Low-level juvenile offenders should be served locally, and California should re-invest the savings from reducing the CYA population to fund supervised treatment options at the local level;
- **Create new grant programs to fund evidence-based interventions and promising programs for youth at the local level:** Youth with serious mental health and substance abuse problems require specialized and intensive services. Counties need funding and technical assistance to develop local programs and services to treat these populations. California's experience with Challenge Grants represents a good model for how these

services could be developed and funded. Programs that serve some of the juvenile delinquent population that the state could build upon include:

- **Multi-Systemic Therapy (MST):** In the program, behavioral and family therapies, MST therapists available 24-hours a day and work with the youth and family to improve a young person's behavior, coping skills, mental health and academic performance. Funds from the JJCPA currently support an MST program serving LA county probation youth.
- **Wraparound:** This strength-based, family-focused case management program "wraps" services around the child and the family with the goal of getting the youth back at home and in school. Wraparound programs in California currently serve youth in foster care as well as probation youth with severe emotional disturbances who would otherwise be in out-of-home placement. Sixteen counties have implemented wraparound programs serving youth in the foster care and probation systems.
- **Juvenile Mental Health Courts:** This specialized juvenile court identifies juvenile delinquents with serious biological mental health problems and provides them with treatment and case management. A multi-disciplinary team from probation, county mental health and the offices of the district attorney and public defender work together to hold youth accountable and develop effective treatment plans. Both Los Angeles and Santa Clara operate juvenile mental health courts in their counties.

4) Maintain CYA's Independence from the California Department of Corrections (CDC)

To protect CYA's mission of rehabilitation of youth, the administration and operation of the CYA should remain independent and separate from the CDC, whose primary goal has, until now, been defined as punishment. Other states which have had unified systems are creating "firewalls" between their adult and juvenile corrections systems. At a time when the CYA is being criticized for poor conditions of confinement, and inadequate treatment services, turning over management of CYA facilities to an agency that is also responsible for CDC would likely detract from efforts to improve treatment and aftercare services for wards.

Thank you for your consideration. I am prepared to take any questions.